



The Secretary of Energy

Washington, DC 20585

January 30, 2002

The Honorable Edward J. Markey
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515-2107

Dear Representative Markey:

Thank you for your letter expressing concern and requesting information regarding the Department of Energy's program for producing tritium in Tennessee Valley Authority reactors to support the Nation's nuclear weapons stockpile.

Because detailed answers to certain of your questions would be classified, it would not be appropriate to address them here. However, we would be pleased to make arrangements for you or a properly cleared staff member to receive a classified briefing regarding the requested information.

I have several observations regarding whether the Nuclear Regulatory Commission license amendments for the Tennessee Valley Authority reactors are still required.

First, recycling tritium is not a substitute for tritium production. The Department has always purified and recycled the tritium that is removed from retired, dismantled, and active nuclear weapons and will continue the practice in the future. Therefore, recycled tritium is taken into account when tritium supply and demand are calculated. The Department makes these calculations continuously to determine tritium requirements for actual and potential nuclear weapons stockpile scenarios. President George W. Bush's announcement of reductions in deployed nuclear weapons over the next decade will not delay the need for new tritium or the need for license amendments for the Tennessee Valley Authority reactors.

Second, the Tennessee Valley Authority has requested that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission license three Tennessee Valley Authority reactors to irradiate up to 2,304 tritium-producing rods per operating cycle in each of the reactors. This number of rods is the maximum that can be irradiated without affecting the electrical-power generating capacity of the reactors. The maximum number of rods that could be irradiated is not necessarily related to the tritium demands of the nuclear weapons stockpile.

Third, in July 1998 the *Interagency Review of the Nonproliferation Implications of Alternative Tritium Production Technologies* was forwarded to Congress by the Department. That review encompassed the policy issues you raised in your letter associated with the use of commercial reactors to assist with a military mission.

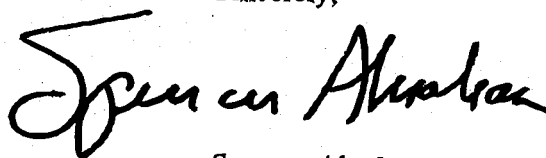


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Former Secretary Richardson took this report into account when he decided in December 1998 to use Tennessee Valley Authority reactors to assist the Department with its tritium production mission. Subsequently, the Congress and the President codified the Secretary's decision in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000, which mandated that the Secretary of Energy "shall produce new tritium" to meet stockpile requirements at the Tennessee Valley Authority reactors.

If you or cleared members of your staff require discussion of the classified information associated with tritium requirements, please contact me or Mr. Dan. R. Brouillette, Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs, at (202) 586-5450.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Spencer Abraham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "S".

Spencer Abraham